

What is claimed is:

1. An improved system for authentication of mail pieces bearing bar-coded indicia, the system comprising first and second bar-code readers, said first and second bar-code readers differing in that said first bar-code reader has a lower rate of successful reading of bar-coded indicia than said second bar-code reader, said system defining a first paper path through said first bar-code reader and subsequently through a first collator, said system disposed to collate a mail piece bearing an indicium in a second paper path in the event of a successful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said first bar-code reader, said system disposed to collate mail pieces in a third paper path in the event of an unsuccessful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said first bar-code reader, said third paper path leading to said second bar-code reader, said system disposed to collate mail pieces in a fourth paper path in the event of a successful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said second bar-code reader, said system disposed to collate mail pieces in a fifth paper path in the event of an unsuccessful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said second bar-code reader.
2. The improved system of claim 1 further comprising a third bar-code reader, said second and third bar-code readers differing in that said second bar-code reader has a lower rate of successful reading of bar-coded indicia than said third bar-code reader, said system further defining said fifth paper path through a second collator, said system disposed to collate mail pieces in a sixth paper path in the event of a successful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said second bar-code reader, said system disposed to collate mail pieces in a seventh paper path in the event of an unsuccessful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said second bar-code reader.
3. The improved system of claim 1 wherein the first bar-code reader is less expensive than the second bar-code reader.
4. The improved system of claim 1 wherein the first bar-code reader is faster than the second bar-code reader.
5. The improved system of claim 1 wherein the first bar-code reader has lower scanning resolution than the second bar-code reader.
6. A method for authenticating mail pieces bearing bar-coded indicia, the method comprising the steps of passing a mail piece bearing an indicium through a first bar-code reader, subsequently automatically collating said mail piece to a second paper path to a second bar-code reader in the event of an unsuccessful reading of said indicium by said first bar-code reader, said first and second bar-code readers differing in that said first bar-code reader has a lower rate of successful reading of bar-coded indicia than said second bar-code reader.
7. The method of claim 6 further comprising subsequently automatically collating said mail piece to a third paper path in the event of successful reading of said indicium by said second bar-code reader.
8. The method of claim 6 further comprising subsequently automatically collating said mail piece to a fourth paper path to a third bar-code reader in the event of an unsuccessful reading of

said bar-coded indicium by said second bar-code reader, said second and third bar-code readers differing in that said second bar-code reader has a lower rate of successful reading of bar-coded indicia than said third bar-code reader.

9. The method of claim 8 further comprising subsequently automatically collating said mail piece to a fifth paper path in the event of successful reading of said indicium by said third bar-code reader.

10. The method of claim 8 further comprising subsequently automatically collating said mail piece to a sixth paper path in the event of unsuccessful reading of said indicium by said third bar-code reader.

11. The method of claim 7 further comprising the step of delivering the mail piece after said successful reading of said indicium by said second bar-code reader.

12. The method of claim 9 further comprising the step of delivering the mail piece after said successful reading of said indicium by said third bar-code reader.

13. The method of claim 6 further comprising subsequently automatically collating said mail piece to a fifth paper path in the event of an unsuccessful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said second bar-code reader.

14. The method of claim 13 further comprising the step of returning the mail piece to the sender after unsuccessful reading of said bar code by said second bar-code reader.

15. The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of returning the mail piece to the sender after unsuccessful reading of said bar code by said third bar-code reader.

16. The method of claim 6 further comprising subsequently performing a cryptographic authentication of said indicium and automatically collating said mail piece to a seventh paper path in the event of successful authentication of said bar code by said second bar-code reader.

17. The method of claim 6 further comprising subsequently performing a cryptographic authentication of said indicium and automatically collating said mail piece to an eighth paper path in the event of unsuccessful authentication of said bar code by said second bar-code reader.

18. The method of claim 9 further comprising subsequently performing a cryptographic authentication of said indicium and automatically collating said mail piece to a ninth paper path in the event of successful authentication of said bar code by said third bar-code reader.

19. The method of claim 9 further comprising subsequently performing a cryptographic authentication of said indicium and automatically collating said mail piece to a tenth paper path in the event of unsuccessful authentication of said bar code by said third bar-code reader.

20. An improved system for authentication of mail pieces bearing bar-coded indicia, the system

comprising first, second, and third bar-code readers, said first and third bar-code readers differing in that said first bar-code reader has a lower rate of successful reading of bar-coded indicia than said third bar-code reader, said second and third bar-code readers differing in that said second bar-code reader has a lower rate of successful reading of bar-coded indicia than said third bar-code reader,

said system defining a first paper path through said first bar-code reader and subsequently through a first collator, said system disposed to collate a mail piece bearing an indicium in a second paper path in the event of a successful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said first bar-code reader, said system disposed to collate mail pieces in a third paper path in the event of an unsuccessful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said first bar-code reader, said third paper path leading to said third bar-code reader,

said system defining a fourth paper path through said second bar-code reader and subsequently through a second collator, said system disposed to collate a mail piece bearing an indicium in a fifth paper path in the event of a successful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said second bar-code reader, said system disposed to collate mail pieces in a sixth paper path in the event of an unsuccessful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said second bar-code reader, said sixth paper path leading to said third bar-code reader

said system disposed to collate mail pieces in a seventh paper path in the event of a successful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said third bar-code reader, said system disposed to collate mail pieces in an eighth paper path in the event of an unsuccessful reading of said bar-coded indicium by said third bar-code reader.

21. The improved system of claim 20 wherein the first and second bar-code readers are each less expensive than the third bar-code reader.

22. The improved system of claim 20 wherein the first and second bar-code readers are each faster than the third bar-code reader.

23. The improved system of claim 20 wherein the first and second bar-code readers each have lower scanning resolution than the third bar-code reader.